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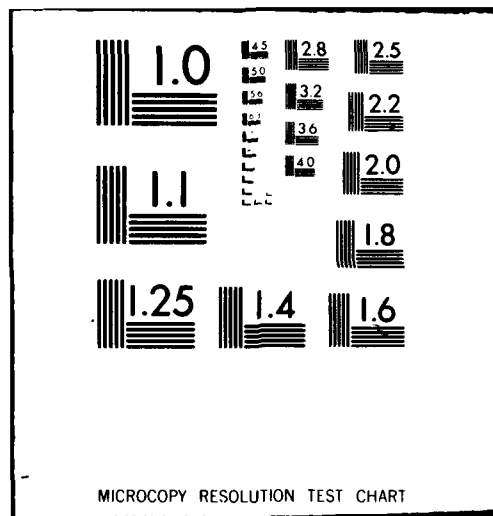
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DEAR ANNE . . .

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**NAVAL MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND**

BETHESDA, MARYLAND

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Dear Anne . . .

Anne Holberg

This ship is not my idea of a good place to work. The food is not as good as it was at boot camp. Our CO and XO think only of the ship and not of the men. Overall, though, I think that the Navy is good.

I probably couldn't ask for a better command. About five months ago, we had a change of command and our new commanding officer is one of a very few. This man is very understanding of the crew; he has done a lot for us which makes him outstanding to us. If not for his time, willingness, and consideration, this ship would not be together.

Sometimes the by-products of a research project prove to be as interesting as the main outcomes. In a recent investigation of the adaption of sailors to various aspects of Navy life, including experience in recruit training, in Navy school, aboard ship, and in a wide variety of units and commands, we examined the similarities and differences in characteristics of sailors across several occupational specialties. The first contact with the participants was established during the recruit training or Navy "A" school experience and the follow-up phase was conducted after at least one year from the initial meeting. Three-fourths of the 6800 sailors in our population had attended an in-service school which led them to one or another of six occupational specialties; the other quarter went directly to the fleet upon completion of recruit and apprenticeship training. For the final phase, we mailed research questionnaires, designed to assess sailors' perceptions of their environmental settings, to these 6800 men and women assigned to duty stations throughout the world.

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In an accompanying letter, specifically addressed to each person, an appeal was made for the sailor to complete and return the questionnaires. We also allowed the responding sailor to do more than just circle the appropriate answer on the questionnaires. The following sentence was also included in the informal letter: "If you would care to make any comments about the Navy, your duty station, or these questionnaires, I hope that you will do so on the reverse side of this letter and return it with the forms in the enclosed envelope."

Although quite unexpected, we received, in addition to a 52 percent return rate for the questionnaires, over 600 letters in which sailors discussed their feelings about various facets of Navy life. The 600 responses to this informal inquiry constitute the fascinating by-product which, while satisfying none of our research criteria, still supply some information of interest to the thoughtful student.

From these letters, it is possible to identify those aspects of Navy life considered most important to the letter writers. A presentation of selected comments can provide an opportunity for the reader to: (1) evaluate the quality of Navy life, as perceived by enlisted personnel, and (2) assess the effectiveness of this technique in attaining such information. To achieve these objectives, this essay is a presentation of sailors' favorable and unfavorable comments compiled into categories from which conclusions can be drawn about today's Navy and this method of data collection.

The tone of the letters, quite eloquently conveyed by the writers, was one of sincerity, concern, and frankness. The various themes mentioned in the letters were tabulated and fell into approximately 20 categories. After

conducting a more thorough content analysis of the letters, five dimensions emerged which encompassed all comments. These five categories included feelings about: (1) officers and supervisors, (2) working conditions, (3) rules and regulations, (4) personnel utilization, and (5) other aspects of Navy life. These categories will be discussed in that order, or from the highest to lowest response rate, and will include selected favorable and unfavorable comments pertaining to them. As a means of protecting the anonymity of the sailors, the comments have been paraphrased.

#### Feelings about Officers and Supervisors

Over two hundred letters were received in which writers expressed feelings about their superiors and the relationship between superiors and subordinates. Even though the majority of the letter writers viewed this relationship in an unfavorable light, many sailors wrote about qualities that were descriptive of an effective leader. Among the examples of commendable leadership characteristics, several letter writers portrayed their superiors as being supportive, helpful, and flexible. Comments from two sailors illustrated these qualities:

My military personnel officer and supervisor have helped me to put my school training to good use. They explained the way things should be done and they let me prove that I could handle my job. If ever a problem arose, I knew that I could turn to them and get an understandable answer. Due to these supervisors, I am happy in my rate and enjoy the Navy.

Life in the Navy depends upon supervisors. If they're all right, then the Navy isn't bad; but if they're not, you can't wait to get out. The chief is the most important factor. If he's a good chief, he can work around a bad officer and he can straighten out a bad petty officer. Our division is pretty good all the way down the line.

Other leadership qualities, inferred from sailors' comments, included a sincere regard and concern for subordinates. Several superiors were also described as having the ability to encourage their men to pursue opportunities available for personal growth and development. One sailor discussed his feelings about his superiors:

I have one comment to make about my ship. Last February, the Captain, XO, Corpsman, and my leading Petty Officer begged and, more or less, forced me to take the E-4 examination. At the time I really griped about it, but now that I made E-4, I feel more at ease and I thanked them for begging me to take it.

Another example of effective leadership, as described by a letter writer, was illustrated in this excerpt even though officers and supervisors were not mentioned:

I really don't know if it's my rate or my duty station, but life here is good! Every person is allowed to learn as much as he or she wants to learn. Responsibility is delegated accordingly. I've learned a great deal here. Navy personnel are very open about sharing job and career experiences.

In compiling the unfavorable comments about noneffective leaders, many remarks conveyed the feeling that officers and supervisors treated the non-rated men and not-so-senior petty officers with little respect and consideration which seemed to widen the existing chasm between superiors and subordinates.

Two selected comments expressed these views:

The "caste" system between officers and enlisted is still duly enforced. The way officers talk to the enlisted people is frequently appallingly condescending, patronizing, and self-righteous.

The haughty and inconsiderate attitudes of officers and senior enlisted personnel are factors which can turn a good duty station into a barely tolerable situation.

As a means of bridging this gap, another sailor suggested that communication should be encouraged between enlisted personnel and officers:

Our supposedly senior enlisted advisor does not even know one-tenth of the men he is supposed to be representing to our captain. In the last 21 months, we have only had two Captain's Calls. More time should be spent between officers and enlisted discussing the way things are.

Other unfavorable remarks about officers and supervisors indicated that superiors were afraid to stand up for their men, that they constantly nagged or hassled everyone ("Harassment is the order of the day here!"), that they had little concern for their men or their problems, that they worked against their sailors, that they looked down upon their men, and that they did not care whether or not the men were alive. One sailor, for example, remarked that he frequently had the feeling that his superiors thought of him as a piece of machinery, or worse yet, not at all. A few of the sailors expressed the feeling that their superiors regarded the ship as being far more important than the men. Others stated that officers and supervisors seemed to think that it was essential for the men to "look" busy at all times so that they, the officers and supervisors, would "look good." And finally, a few superiors were labeled as noneffective, incompetent, inefficient, overly excitable ("real sweats"), and indecisive. One sailor remarked:

The quality of officers and others chosen to "lead" has taken a sharp decline lately. Those who are there to guide and supervise you are never those who know the job at hand.

In these comments, the letter writers furnished examples of those favorable and unfavorable leadership qualities in their officers and supervisors that were viewed as important enough to discuss in letter form. A composite of the



favorable characteristics portrayed an effective superior as an intelligent and mature individual who encouraged and supported his subordinates while providing them with opportunities for personal growth and job satisfaction. Compiled from the unfavorable comments, on the other hand, a noneffective superior was described as unconcerned, disinterested, and incompetent whose supervisory skills consisted of harassing and belittling his subordinates. The difference between these two descriptions was that the effective leader guided his subordinates without resorting to a show of power or scare tactics, whereas a noneffective leader used his authority or power to exert control over his men by disparaging, nagging, and chastising them.

#### Feelings about Working Conditions

More than a hundred letter writers expressed feelings about working conditions at their duty stations. While the majority of the letter writers indicated that they had to work hard for long periods of time, many described their work at the same time as being challenging, interesting, fulfilling, and personally satisfying. Three examples illustrated these views:

When I was at my last duty station, I was selected to fill a billet as a Legal Yeoman even though I was only an E-3 at the time. While I was there, I could not have had a better supervisor or job. Although there was a lot of work to do, I was happy with my responsibilities.

As far as my duty station is concerned, everything is as I hoped it would be. The work is interesting and the people here are one of the best bunch of men I've ever met. Everyone has a job to do and everyone does it. There are times when we work late, but then again, whenever someone needs time off, there really isn't any problem in getting it.

I would like to say that my present duty station is ideal in that the work is challenging. The hours are long and the work is hard. The majority of the crew is proud to be a member of this submarine.

Among the unfavorable comments, there were remarks about having to work while others went on liberty, having to work harder and longer than others who received equal pay, and finding the amount of work endless and insurmountable. A few writers stated that the dedicated sailor "worked more than others and was rewarded less." For example:

In this division, there are about 35 men and about 10 do most or all of the work. If you are a hard worker, everyone depends on you. Also, when a petty officer tells you to do something, he wants it done NOW! Yet, he won't ask someone else to do it who isn't doing anything at the time.

Several men remarked that there were too many officers and senior petty officers in ratio to non-rated men and lower ranked petty officers. The effect of this imbalance was that the writers felt exploited while their superiors merely watched or supervised. One sailor commented:

We have 3 first class, 1 second class, 4 third class, and only 1 striker; the only ones doing any work are the 4 third class and the striker. The normal place for the first and second class petty officers is sitting on their butts.

Two sailors expressed their feelings about being overworked and unappreciated after performing tasks that resulted from poor planning and lack of cooperative effort:

A command can use its manpower unmercilessly as there is no extra cost in labor as there is in private industry. The crew is threatened with longer hours or other things to get what the command wants which is a promotion to Admiral, Captain, or whatever. If the excuse for these longer hours is "fleet readiness," I think it is a poor explanation for command inefficiencies and disorganization in getting work accomplished in normal hours.

Navy life would be a whole lot easier if everyone would learn to work together instead of always trying to pull rank. Being able to work things out together makes a job worthwhile because everyone enjoys a feeling of accomplishment. Nothing seems to be appreciated here, no matter how long you work. Credit is never given where it is due because superiors always take it. At other duty stations, I have seen people work together and they were efficient.

Although comments about working conditions indicated that most sailors worked diligently for many hours, many writers felt that this overload was not necessarily related to job dissatisfaction. On the contrary, for many sailors, it was apparent that the enjoyment experienced in accomplishing a particular job was intensified after much effort had been expended. The distinction between exploitation and overload, therefore, centered around an individual's interpretation of his role in the mission. If he felt that such dedication and exertion enhanced esprit de corps or his self-esteem, as contrasted with the view that the group's effort resulted in gratification solely for his superiors or the commanding officer, his level of personal involvement and motivation would increase or remain on a high plane. If, on the other hand, the sailor felt that he was not an important participant in the mission, he would probably become less motivated to perform the job at hand and seek ways to avoid work. Most of the comments about working conditions, unfortunately, conveyed the feeling that many sailors were disheartened about the importance of their contributions to the total group effort. A sailor expressed his feelings:

I personally do not like the idea that the men who keep the ship in running order, the firemen that is, don't get the same liberty as others and that airmen always get the credit before the snipes.

Feelings about the Rules and Regulations

Less than a hundred letters were received in which the writers discussed their feelings about the enforcement of the rules and regulations. While most of the sailors thought that the Navy's rules and regulations were necessary and reasonable, they felt that many rules were misused or abused for the convenience of superiors. One sailor described the moral climate at this duty station:

This duty station has a false sense of morality about it. The Navy has set up rules and regulations to live by; however, if it will be beneficial for your company, division, or ship to break these rules and not get caught, you will be encouraged to do so.

Many letter writers felt that many regulations, such as hair length, acceptable facial hair styles, and other grooming standards, were too rigidly enforced and that the "tight-fisted control" on the personal aspect of military life should be lifted a little. Within many duty stations, other writers commented that the zealous enforcement of minor rules and regulations frequently resulted in instances when individuals were harshly punished for committing a minor transgression. Two comments illustrated these feelings:

Punishment is severe even for minor offenses. The atmosphere is always heavy with "Well, what are they going to do to us today?" It's so bad that this command's system is known to the enlisted men as T.H.P. (Troop Harassment Program). Very rarely does the crew hear or see a complimentary gesture for extended group effort in a particularly large and challenging mission. As a result, most of the crew spend their time "skating" out of jobs or staying out of sight of superiors.

Nothing is said for a job well done, but some infraction in the rules will cause a sailor to be belittled or treated in such a way that he or she doesn't know what to do. This, to me at least, seems to cause a lack of initiative and effectiveness in a job.

As inferred from these comments, the letter writers expressed considerable concern about improving the interpretation and enforcement of the existing rules and regulations. Many individuals voiced a need for a "loosening up" of the enforcement of such minor regulations as hair length and clothing stipulations, as well as a "tightening up" in the enforcement of the more important security and safety regulations. Overall, most sailors hoped to see more consistency across duty stations in the enforcement of the rules and regulations, and a reduction in the severity of punishment for offenses the letter writers considered to be minor.

#### Feelings about Personnel Utilization and Navy Training

Most of the comments within this category were divided into favorable and unfavorable letters about classification policies, personnel utilization, on-the-job training, and the Navy school experience. A few individuals felt that less emphasis should be placed on test scores for classification purposes. One man, for example, expressed his feelings about the importance of test scores and receiving a school assignment:

I think that I could pass and excel in any service school. I was never given a chance because I only have a 100 GCT and ARI combination based on the BTB taken during our hectic training in boot camp. During apprenticeship school, I topped my class and also became honor man of my company. I really regret not having a chance for "A" school. I really don't believe that one's capabilities should be based upon this kind of test achievement.

Several sailors remarked that it was impossible to change a job or transfer to another duty station. Other letter writers stated that their training and time in the Navy were not being adequately or fully utilized. One remarked:

My tour has been very enjoyable, however, I feel that women should be allowed on ships because many males always throw it in our faces that we are taking up their shore billets. I am not here to compete, just do a job. Work in communications is probably a lot more involved at sea and I wish that I could experience it.

Somewhat along those same lines, a few sailors expressed their opinions about the benefits of on-the-job training. Two comments illustrated these views:

First of all, I think the Navy wastes a lot of time and money when it sends a person to "A" school. After he graduates and arrives at his duty station, he mess cooks for 3 months. After that, he's put back in the shop and he's forgotten certain things related to his work. Rather than help him, his superiors tell him to get a paint brush and paint. Now I ask you, does that make sense after spending all that time and money on training a man? I personally think that if a person went to the fleet first to look around at different jobs and to do all his mess cooking, he could then attend "A" school and return to his work having a better chance of retaining everything he learned.

Even though I attended "A" school immediately after boot camp, there is nothing like O.J.T. Then, after a sailor knows what to expect, he should go to "A" school. With O.J.T. first, he'll perform better in "A" school.

As evaluators of their school experiences, many former students commented that they were surprised that most material learned in school applied readily to problem-solving in the work setting. Others, however, remarked that for them a considerable loss occurred in the transfer of learning from school to their subsequent duty station. The letter writers, furthermore, were equally divided between those who rated the school experience within a range from good to excellent and those who remarked that improvements should be made within the school programs. These recommendations included: that students learn to operate the up-to-date equipment used at most duty stations rather than learning to operate obsolete

equipment, that all clerical forms used throughout the Navy should be presented in school, and that students could be "pushed" to learn more in school. Several sailors also remarked that it was difficult making the transition from civilian to military life, i.e., "I think that the psychological adjustment from civilian to military life should be stressed more in service school training."

Feelings about Other Aspects of Navy Life--Physical Surroundings and Benefits

Most of the letters received within this category consisted of comments about the work setting, living conditions, and Navy benefits. Approximately 50 sailors submitted remarks describing the physical attributes of their duty stations, many of which were labeled as being in "sad shape." Conditions on ships were portrayed as hazardous, uncomfortable, and unorganized. One sailor, for example, remarked that he worried about the inevitability of a fire occurring on the ship or of a compartment being flooded. A few men were concerned about the scarcity of parts needed for the ship, that essential pieces of equipment were out of commission, and that some of the parts were so old they had to be hand-made. One sailor commented:

This duty station is inefficient which is due to the poorness of the machinery and quality of the product. This, in turn, wastes many man hours. A man's work is only as good as his machinery.

A number of letters pertained to the unpalatability of the food, the lack of drinking water, the inconvenience of water hours, the long lines for meals, the lack of adequate storage space, the closeness of the racks, the thinness of the mattresses, the lack of ventilation, and the excessive noise and temperatures. A few sailors stated that many ships did not have areas designated for relaxation

and that shipboard activities should include more programs for pleasure, education, and relaxation. One letter writer remarked:

Aspects of one's surroundings aren't too important such as the color or size of work space. Most people don't mind a crowded work space, but a place to relax is important. A recreation area or some place to get away from the office to relax when at sea or play cards is non-existent in most divisions.

Less than twenty letter writers commented about advancement policies and Navy benefits. Several sailors felt that a better system for promotions should be instituted, whereas others were more concerned that the Navy was losing too many of its benefits. A few sailors were unable to understand, "why it was so difficult to get BAQ and COMRATS." Another sailor submitted his global view of Navy life:

I feel that far too much time is spent on small issues. I think that "Personnel Handling Policies" are the only problems the Navy has. The Navy tries so hard to keep morale high -- in all the wrong areas. I feel that the Navy should pay more attention to the wants, needs, and suggestions of its personnel.

Other topics should be mentioned even though less than ten respondents commented upon each of these subjects: race relations, drug and alcohol problems, recruiters, medical care, civilian co-workers, tradition, and separation from one's family. Since none of the letter writers complained about the basic pay that he received in the Navy, this omission suggested that these letter writers may have been relating feelings about issues far more important to them than money. Several sailors, however, felt that there should be some monetary compensation for working ten or eleven hours a day.



### Discussion

The method of data collection discussed in this article was found to be quite effective in eliciting free responses from sailors. The impetus, which resulted in a relatively high return rate from the letter writers, was probably attributable to the informal, introductory letter that we sent to each sailor. Although obviously a form letter, each sailor's first name had been hand-written in the salutation and the letter was signed by a civilian who seemed to be concerned about the enlistee's welfare and protecting his anonymity.

Collecting information about sailors' feelings from their comments involves some disadvantages in that the content of the letters has to be analyzed and categorized which could be time consuming and require some interpretative ability. Even so, the opportunity afforded by this technique to get a sense of what the sailor is actually experiencing in today's Navy far outweighs the disadvantages. Written in a lucid style occasionally laced with vivid language, these letters conveyed feelings of contentment as well as feelings of despair about experiences in the Navy. Although many objective test instruments have been designed to tap such sentiments, those measures simply cannot capture the range of feelings expressed in the comments received.

For many readers, the letter-writing technique of data collection may seem to lack experimental sophistication, and the data received, though quite fortuitous, may be considered as too subjective or anecdotal to be of practical value. When compared with other methods, such as interviews or write-in questionnaires, however, the procedures for making the data usable were quite

similar in that the responses and comments had to be interpreted and condensed into meaningful categories. Frequency distributions of favorable and unfavorable comments in the letters also had to be tabulated for each category, a quantitative descriptive technique that would, no doubt, be performed for data from attitude questionnaires and environmental scales. Although comparable in many ways with those instruments, this method was distinctly different in that the comments provided examples of real human feelings which, when combined with the attitudes discussed within each category, increased the credibility and seemed to humanize the results. Such data, it seems, could be incorporated, along with findings from attitudinal and environmental studies, into proposals designed to influence Navy policy or recommend improvements in Navy life.

Another positive aspect of this method was that of providing an outlet for the sailor to "air" his feelings; hundreds of letter writers remarked that they were grateful for having this opportunity to express their feelings. By responding to the suggestion to share their opinions, the letter writers stated that they felt much better after releasing some pent-up emotions even though they were aware that their comments would result in few, if any, changes in their Navy situations. In addition to discussing their views about various aspects of Navy life, approximately 50 sailors also added recommendations for ways to improve the questionnaires that had been sent to them! For all these reasons, research questionnaires and surveys should be designed to include at least one open-end question or essay page.

The comments discussed in this paper provide the reader with a picture of Navy life as compiled from letters written by 600 sailors. The most important aspects of their Navy experiences consisted of the relationship between superiors and subordinates, working conditions, rules and regulations, and personnel utilization. As inferred from their comments, the majority of sailors viewed the relationship between superiors and subordinates as an extremely significant facet of Navy life. Perhaps this category occupied the most important part, since superiors controlled the work setting, the enforcement of the rules and regulations, and the use of personnel. The letter writers also identified variables associated with job satisfaction: assuming responsibility, receiving encouragement and praise, being assigned to challenging tasks, and having opportunities for personal growth. Since the realization of these satisfiers corresponds with the duties of officers and supervisors, the letter writers were again emphasizing the importance of this relationship.

After reading the unfavorable comments about this relationship and working conditions, however, it became apparent that attempts to unionize the Navy could receive considerable support, for a variety of reasons, from non-rated men and lower-ranked petty officers. Many sailors, for example, remarked that while they felt their hard work had earned them consideration and respect, little was given. Others commented that they were being exploited by having to work ten to twelve hours a day for extended periods of time, efforts that resulted in few expressions of praise or appreciation. At many duty stations, the

emphasis on control and punishment was described as excessive and counter-productive in that many sailors were so harassed that they were unable to perform effectively. Comments, such as these, could also be interpreted by union organizers as indicators that sailors had indirectly voiced a need for unionization.

In conclusion, the letter-writing technique itself provided us with an opportunity to act as ombudsmen and "listen" to these writers' remarks. As the letters began to arrive in rubber-banded bundles, this interesting diversion evolved into one of the highlights of the research project. Perhaps most important of all, the letter served a purpose in that it became an avenue for the writers to share some heart-felt feelings with an impartial "listener." In many instances, the lavish expressions of gratitude indicated just how important it was to "air" these feelings.

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20. conditions, (3) rules and regulations, (4) personnel utilization, and (5) other aspects of Navy life. To the majority of sailors, the relationship between superiors and subordinates was cited as extremely important and was associated with the job satisfaction variables of assuming responsibility, receiving encouragement and praise, being assigned to challenging jobs, and having opportunities for personal growth. This study showed that while the letter-writing technique proved effective as a means of collecting data, this method also provided the letter writer with an opportunity to "air" his feelings about being in today's Navy.

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